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Testimony of Phil Sherwood
Deputy Director of the
CT Citizen Action Group
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My name is Phil Sherwood and I'm the Deputy Director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG). CCAG is one of the states oldest and largest public interest groups and has approximately 25,000 member families. CCAG was one of the lead groups advocating for the states new Citizens' Election Program.

The Governor's budget mitigation package in November cut \$5 million from the Clean Elections Fund and the January 2009 deficit package stripped another \$7.5 million from the fund. The Governor's budget now calls for an additional \$12 million cut to the Citizen Election fund in 2010, and then another, \$12 million in 2011.

We strongly oppose the cuts presented in the Governor's budget to the Citizen Election program. We also oppose shifting the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) expenditures into the Citizen Election Fund. These actions, coupled with the aforementioned cuts, will likely make the historic legislation passed in the wake of the Rowland scandal inoperable. Scandals over the past several years have cost Connecticut taxpayers millions of dollars in bad deals, no bid contracts and a massive loss in public trust.

We understand the justification for some of the prior cuts that have been made to the program in November and January given the economic conditions. Every program should and must be examined. We believe that the additional cuts proposed by the Governor to the Clean Election program will seriously jeopardize the past efforts of this legislature to restore the publics trust in government.

The new system has successfully opened the door to legitimate candidates and has done so while encouraging all candidates to spend their time courting small donors and voters, rather than large private contributors, most of which used to reside outside of the candidate's district. This has enabled candidates to spend more time communicating their values and issues to voters. The program's popularity exceeded the expectations of advocates: 153 out of 187 (81%) of the candidates now in the General Assembly ran using the Clean Elections program.

The program's popularity is relevant when examining the budget. All states that have enacted some form of Clean Elections have seen an increase in candidate participation after the first couple of election cycles. We also have not yet seen a statewide campaign under the Clean Election program, which will obviously require more funds than the last election cycle.

We would also like to oppose the Governor's proposal of repealing CGS 9-7c, which prohibits the office of the Governor from proposing budget modifications to the state's watchdog agencies. It's important that the legislature continue to protect these agencies from the potential of being targeted for the reasons of political retribution.

CCAG would like to thank the committee for their time and their consideration.